

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9305
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LONDON 13391

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS PINT PGOV UK EI
SUBJECT: THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROBLEM

THIS MESSAGE WAS PREPARED BY CONGEN BELFAST.

1. EMBASSY LONDON IS TRANSMITTING FOR BELFAST AN AIRGRAM ON NORTHERN IRELAND'S POLITICAL PROSPECTS THAT AFTER EXAMINING THE POLITICAL FAILURES HERE IN RECENT YEARS AND THE FORCES AT PLAY, LOOKS AT THE VARIOUS SCHEMES ADVANCED TO RESOLVE THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROBLEM AND CONCLUDES THAT, IN THE SHORT TO MEDIUM TERM, DIRECT RULE FROM WESTMINSTER IS PROBABLY THE BEST THAT CAN BE HOPED. THE PRINCIPAL U.S. INTEREST IS TO ACHIEVE A PEACEFUL OUTCOME THAT IS ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH COMMUNITIES. AS SEEN FROM BELFAST, THERE IS ALSO THE NEGATIVE INTEREST OF AVOIDING BEING DRAWN IN AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR A PROBLEM NOT OF THE UNITED STATES' MAKING, AND FOR THE SOLUTION OF WHICH WE HAVE NO UNIQUE WISDOM TO OFFER. THE UNITED STATES, HOWEVER, HAS CLEAN HANDS AND IS TRUSTED BY ALL PARTIES WHO DO HAVE RESPONSIBILITY. WITHOUT ENCROACHING UNDULY, IT CAN ENCOURAGE DIRECT RULE

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TO BE FRUITFUL, AND DISCOURAGE ACTIONS BY WHATEVER PARTY THAT WOULD WORSEN THE SITUATION.

2. THE PLAYERS. THE SYSTEM THAT RULED NORTHERN IRELAND FROM STORMONT, BEGINNING WITH PARTITION TO THE EARLY 1970S, SEEMS DEAD. WITH IT IS DESTROYED THE POLITICAL UNITY OF THE "PROTESTANTS,"--THE "LOYALISTS," OR THE

"UNIONISTS"--WHATEVER LABEL ONE CALLS THE MAJORITY COMMUNITY IN NI. WITH SOME EXCEPTIONS, THIS MAJORITY (TWO-THIRDS OF THE POPULATION) STILL SEEKS DOMINANT STATUS IN THE PROVINCE--THUS REFUSING TO ENTER INTO A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE "CATHOLIC" OR "REPUBLICAN" MINORITY COMMUNITY--AND IT REJECTS A UNITED IRELAND IN ANY FORM. AT THE SAME TIME, MANY OF THE MAJORITY ARE DISILLUSIONED THAT BRITAIN HAS NOT PUT THEIR INTERESTS HIGHER.

3. IN CONTRAST TO THE ATTITUDE DURING THE PERIOD OF UNIONIST DOMINANCE, THE MOST IMPORTANT AND REPRESENTATIVE PART OF THE MINORITY (CATHOLIC) COMMUNITY HAS ENTERED THE PRESENT POLITICAL SYSTEM. BUT ITS ACCEPTANCE OF A PARTITIONED IRELAND AND MEMBERSHIP IN THE UNITED KINGDOM IS POSITED ON ITS BEING TREATED AS A FULL MEMBER. SINCE IT HAS GOOD REASON TO DISTRUST THE MAJORITY'S BENEVOLENCE IT INSISTS IN PARTICIPATING IN POWER AS A RIGHT. THIS MINORITY STILL MAINTAINS THE GOAL OF A UNITED IRELAND, BUT COUNSELS THAT IT BE APPROACHED GRADUALLY AND IN AGREEMENT WITH THE NORTHERN IRELAND MAJORITY.

4. A SMALL SEGMENT OF THE MINORITY (THE PROVISIONAL IRA) IS STILL INTENT ON USING VIOLENCE TO ACHIEVE THEIR KIND OF IRISH UNITY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. UNDER CURRENT BRITISH POLICY, THEY CAN AT BEST BE DOMINATED BUT PROBABLY NOT SUPPRESSED: BRITISH CIVILIAN LEADERS HAVE LEARNED

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THAT TOUGH MEANS OF REPRESSION ONLY PERPETUATE VIOLENCE BY INCREASING SYMPATHY FOR THE VIOLENT ONES.

5. THE MAJORITY COMMUNITY LIKEWISE HAS ITS MEN OF VIOLENCE, WHO CAN BE MORE RUTHLESS AND FEARSOME THAN THE PROVISIONAL IRA AND, AT TIMES OF STRESS, HAVE SYMPATHY FROM POLITICIANS AND ORDINARY PEOPLE ALIKE. THEY ARE QUIET AT THE MOMENT BECAUSE THEIR COMMUNITY DOES NOT FEEL THREATENED BY THE PROVISIONALS AND IS REASONABLY CONFIDENT THAT BRITAIN WILL NOT ABANDON THEM.

6. THE BRITISH PEOPLE PROBABLY WOULD LIKE TO RID THEMSELVES OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND PROBLEM. LEADERS SHARE THIS DESIRE BUT HAVE BEEN HARSHLY EDUCATED IN THE PAST DECADE TO NORTHERN IRELAND'S IMPORTANCE AND DELICACY. ONE CANNOT BE SURE OF BRITAIN'S CONTINUING SENSITIVITY, ITS WILLINGNESS TO SEND CAPABLE OFFICIALS HERE AND TO SUBSIDIZE NORTHERN IRELAND HEAVILY, OR ITS PATIENCE WITH RESPONSIBILITY OVER THE LONG RUN. WE NEVERTHELESS ASSUME THAT THREE PRINCIPLES NOW ESTABLISHED IN PRACTICE WILL CONTINUE:

-- BRITAIN ACCEPTS THE DEMOCRATIC WILL OF THE NI

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MAJORITY ON MAINTAINING THE UNION WITH BRITAIN, OR
OPTING FOR IRELAND.

-- BRITAIN WILL NOT IMPOSE A CONSTITUTIONAL SETTLE-
MENT AGAINST THE WISHES OF THE NI MAJORITY.
-- ANY EVENTUAL SETTLEMENT MUST BE BROADLY ACCEPT-
ABLE TO THE MAJORITY AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES.

7. AS VIEWED FROM BELFAST, IRISH LEADERS MAY BE REALI-
ZING THAT ROMANTIC NATIONALISM IS NOT ENOUGH. APPARENTLY
THEY ARE TRYING TO DETERMINE WHAT THEY NEED TO DO TO
ATTRACT THE NI MAJORITY INTO UNION, AND THINKING EVEN
WHETHER THE COST TO THE REPUBLIC IS WORTH IT. PRESUM-
ABLY, HOWEVER, THAT ROMANTICISM AND DOMESTIC POLITICAL
PRESSURES WILL LEAD THEM TO BAIT THE BRITISH FROM TIME TO
TIME. AND A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF BAITING REMINDS BRITISH
LEADERS THAT THE PROBLEM WILL NOT GO AWAY.

8. STALEMATE. WE ARE IMPRESSED WITH THE RIGIDITIES OF
THE PRESENT SITUATION. PERHAPS ELECTORAL FEVER HEIGHTENS
THE RIGIDITIES, BUT WE WOULD BE SURPRISED--PLEASANTLY
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SURPRISED--SHOULD A NEW UK GOVERNMENT FIND THE BASIS FOR NEGOTIATING A "SETTLEMENT." EACH ATTEMPT SO FAR HAS FOUND LESS RESPONSE. THE AREA FOR MOVEMENT APPEARS NARROW, ASPIRATIONS INCOMPATIBLE, THE SEPARATION BETWEEN PARTY POSITIONS DEEP, AND THE BASIC FEELINGS OF THE TWO COMMUNITIES STRONG, WITH CONSIDERABLE POTENTIAL FOR A RESURGENCE OF VIOLENCE FROM THE MAJORITY SIDE SHOULD ITS STATUS SEEM ENDANGERED.

9. VARIOUS SOLUTIONS ARE TALKED ABOUT, BUT WE ARE SKEPTICAL OF ALL, AT LEAST IN THE MEDIUM TERM:

-- DEVOLUTION: FAVORED BY ALMOST EVERYONE, AT LEAST IN THE SHORT TERM, BUT OPPOSED BY THE BRITISH, NI MINORITY AND IRELAND UNLESS SOME FORM OF POWER SHARING ACCOMPANIES IT THAT IS ACCEPTABLE TO THE MINORITY. THE PARTIES OF THE MAJORITY APPEAR DEAD SET AGAINST THIS PROSPECT, AND THE MINORITY'S MOST REPRESENTATIVE PARTY, THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOR PARTY (SDLP), IS DISHEARTENED.

-- INTEGRATION: THE BETE NOIRE OF THE MINORITY AND IRELAND, CONTRARY TO BRITISH POLICY, AND DESIRED BY NOT MANY OF THE NI MAJORITY. IT CONTRADICTS THE TENDENCY IN GREAT BRITAIN, WHERE AUTHORITY IS DEVOLVING TO SCOTLAND AND WALES.

-- INDEPENDENCE: FASHIONABLE AT THE MOMENT BUT QUESTIONABLE IN SUBSTANCE. IT IS SUPPORTED BY INSIGNIFICANT ORGANIZATIONS, EXCEPT PERHAPS FOR THE PRINCIPAL LOYALIST PARAMILITARY ORGANIZATION, THE ULSTER DEFENSE ASSOCIATION WHICH SEEMS TO BE LOOKING FOR RESPECTABILITY. INDEPENDENCE WOULD LIKELY BE THE MAJORITY'S FIRST CHOICE SHOULD BRITAIN EJECT NI FROM THE UK, BUT THE RESULTING STATELET PRESUMABLY WOULD BE PROTESTANT-DOMINATED, OR--WITH BRITISH WITHDRAWAL--A CONDOMINIUM OF THE OPPOSITE PAR-

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MILITARIES, OR SO DEPENDENT ON OUTSIDERS FOR SECURITY AND ECONOMIC HELP AS NOT TO BE INDEPENDENT AT ALL.

-- IRISH UNITY: MUCH TO BE SAID FOR IT IN THE LONG TERM, AND MANY WHO OPPOSE IT CONSIDER IT INEVITABLE. THE GROWTH OF A CATHOLIC MAJORITY IN NI CANNOT BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED; IT COULD TAKE GENERATIONS OR NEVER OCCUR. UNLESS BRITAIN IMPOSES ITSELF ON THE NI MAJORITY, AND THAT MAJORITY TAKES IT SUPINELY, THE BEST PROSPECT FOR UNITY IS TIME, PATIENCE, EEC EROSION OF BORDERS, AND SERIOUSNESS FROM THE SOUTH.

10. DIRECT RULE. AT THE RISK OF BEING TAKEN AS APOLO-

GISTS FOR THE BRITISH, THE CONTINUATION OF DIRECT RULE APPEARS TO US THE BEST AND MOST LIKELY PROSPECT FOR THE MID-TERM. FEW ACTIVELY WANT IT, BUT IT IS ALMOST EVERYONE'S SECOND CHOICE. IT PROTECTS IMPORTANT INTERESTS OF BOTH NI COMMUNITIES, PROVIDES GOOD GOVERNMENT (AS LONG AS BRITAIN KEEPS NI IN MIND) DESPITE ITS SEMICOLONIAL ASPECT, AND SHUTS OUT NO OPTIONS. MOREOVER, IT REQUIRES NO INITIATIVE, AND THAT IS IMPORTANT IN NORTHERN IRELAND'S ZERO-BASED POLITICS. THE BRITISH WORRY THAT DIRECT RULE HAS NO POLITICAL BASE, AND WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN SHOULD IT BREAK DOWN. BUT IF HANDLED WELL, IT MIGHT OVER TIME BRING THE NI COMMUNITIES CLOSER IN THE SEARCH FOR THE COMMON GOOD.

11. AFTER THE ELECTIONS. MANY PEOPLE THINK SOMETHING IS BOUND TO HAPPEN. THE IRISH SAY THEY WILL PUSH THE BRITISH TO DO SOMETHING CONSTRUCTIVE (I.E., MOVE TOWARD UNITY), AND WOULD LIKE THE UNITED STATES TO JOIN THEIR ENDEAVOR. OFFICIAL UNIONISTS HOPE FOR A HUNG TORY

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GOVERNMENT SO THEY MIGHT START RECONSTRUCTING STORMONT.
SOME IN THE SDLP THINK A STRONG LABOR GOVERNMENT WOULD
SHIFT FROM NEUTRALITY TOWARD A PREFERENCE FOR IRISH
UNITY.

12. SINCE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NI ROY MASON FELT IMPELLED DURING THE PAST YEAR TO TRY FOR A SCHEME OF INTERIM DEVOLUTION, PERHAPS A NEW SECRETARY OF STATE (WHOEVER HE IS) WILL THINK HE HAS TO DO AT LEAST THAT MUCH. WE ARE SKEPTICAL THAT ANYTHING MORE THAN THAT WILL BE PRACTICAL, IF THAT MUCH. AND ILL THOUGHT OUT, CARELESS INITIATIVES COULD DO GREAT DAMAGE. THIS SEEMS ONE CASE WHERE DOING NOTHING OR LITTLE (EXCEPT MAKING DIRECT RULE POSITIVE) MAY BE THE BEST COURSE.

13. A U.S. ROLE? THE UNITED STATES IS TRUSTED BY ALMOST EVERYONE, ALTHOUGH FAR FEWER THINK AN ACTIVE U.S. POLICY WOULD SUCCEED WHERE SO MANY HAD FAILED. IN A DECISIVE MOMENT, HOWEVER, OUR NEUTRALITY AND DISINTERESTEDNESS COULD BE USEFUL IN BRINGING AN ENDEAVOR TO A CONFIDENTIAL

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SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION, OR AVERTING DISASTER. IN THE INTERIM, IT IS THEREFORE IMPORTANT TO AVOID IDENTIFYING OURSELVES WITH ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER, SO THAT WE MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO HELP SHOULD A DECISIVE MOMENT COME.

BREWSTER

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